

THE PRIEST'S
CANONICAL PRAYER
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WILLI-GIRARDEY

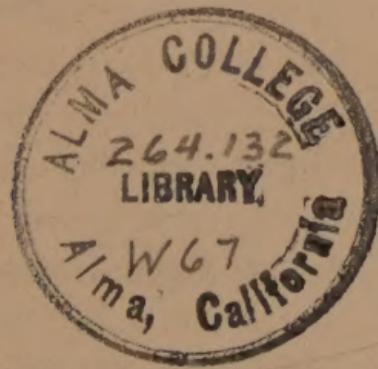
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THE PRIEST'S CANONICAL PRAYER

FROM THE FRENCH OF
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PREFACE

The contents of this booklet have been taken from "*Le Bréviaire Expliqué*" of Rev. Charles Willi, C.S.S.R., a work that has been highly praised by His Eminence Cardinal van Rossum, Prefect of the Propaganda, and other ecclesiastical Superiors and able writers. One of the latter thus speaks of it: "The author, after describing with remarkable depth, clearness and piety the principal motives which endear the Breviary to priests as a pre-eminently sanctifying work, gives an interesting historical sketch of it from the earliest ages of the Church, and beautifully elucidates its economy. The reader can easily see that the author, able expert that he is, has thoroughly investigated all that relates to the history and contents of the Canonical Prayer of the Priest, and that he

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has, moreover, profited by the progress of the Scriptural and Liturgical sciences. No one who has read this book will hesitate to acknowledge: 'Since I have read "Le Bréviaire Expliqué," I recite the Divine Office with greater devotion and profit than heretofore.'"

There is not only a great demand in Europe for Father Willi's book, but there have been also several requests for permission to translate it into other languages; but the author does not intend to grant such permissions, until his work appears in a second edition, which is to contain certain useful improvements. Nevertheless, he has allowed the translator of these short extracts from his work to publish them, not only because they will enable the American Clergy to become acquainted with his work, but also because they are well adapted to promote the spiritual profit of those who will read them.

THE TRANSLATOR.

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THE PRIEST'S CANONICAL PRAYER

1. The Esteem we should have for the Divine Office

Why is the Divine Office sometimes poorly recited? Next to the august Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments, there is nothing more beautiful, more grand, and more sanctifying in the Church than her Canonical Prayer, and, consequently, nothing that should more powerfully incite our love and fervor. Nevertheless, if we were to judge by the carelessness with which the Office is sometimes dispatched, would it not seem that the very last place has been assigned to it in the hierarchy of priestly obligations? To recite the Divine Office without either devotion or attention, with feverish haste, with a mind wholly taken up by

earthly thoughts and cares, lightly to interrupt it in order to talk or joke, to postpone it to the last moment, so that after wasting one's time in things frivolous, one has but few moments left to recite it with the requisite calm and piety,— is to treat too heedlessly a primary duty of our priestly or religious life. Its canonical recitation is a holy work giving immense honor to God, ravishing the angels, and filling a capital rôle in our personal sanctification and in that of the faithful. Therefore we should never acquit ourselves of so sacred a duty with a frivolity which we would not tolerate in others in their intercourse with us. What a terrible revelation on judgment-day will be the sight of the graces we have wasted and of the spiritual miseries we have failed to rid ourselves of through our want of generosity and fervor! This sacred duty well performed would have nourished our supernatural life, for the Liturgical Prayer is a vast reservoir of spiritual light and strength! This point should not escape a serious examination of our conscience, for

if, on the one hand, the obligation of the Liturgical Prayer is a duty which priestly souls are willing to fulfil properly, it is, on the other hand, an obligation of which in practice we are but too apt to forget the importance. The dangers, or obstacles, conspiring against its fervent recitation, are both serious and numerous. Let us briefly consider the principal dangers.

1. The first is the disorder introduced into our heart by original sin and aggravated by our personal sins. We have become strangers to matters pertaining to faith and do not appreciate eternal goods nor feel attracted to them. On the contrary, we are fascinated by earthly things, of which the noise, variety and interest charm us, distract us, take possession of our senses and faculties. The Canonical Prayer is the most lively expression of a soul disengaged from the world and enamored with heaven. It speaks to us in a language, which only the souls transformed by grace can understand and relish. What charm can we experience in meditating on

the great truths the Divine Office reminds us of, if these truths do not remove our indifference, if their remembrance fails to disturb our culpable indifference and insensibility? How shall we feel devotion in uttering merely with our lips holy affections, which have no response in our heart? How can we sincerely and fervently implore graces, which we do not really desire? And if our prayer comes solely from our lips, instead of flowing from our heart, what profit can we derive therefrom? We shall merely press to our lips the savory fruit of the holy Liturgy, without drawing therefrom the invigorating beverage of the supernatural life; we shall crush the grapes without ever drinking their delicious juice: “Thou shalt tread the olives, but shalt not be anointed with the oil; and the new wine, but shalt not drink the wine” (Mich. 6.15). If our Canonical Prayer is fruitless, or at least very laborious, let us strike our breast, for the fault is in our own heart. We should, however, beware of yielding to despondency; so soon as we are resolved to

shake off our tepidity, we are in the condition required for profiting by this great means of sanctification.

2. The second danger to which we expose ourselves is a certain more or less conscious undervaluation of the exercises of the interior life. We do not, indeed, like worldlings, despise piety; for when the occasion offers, we can preach very eloquently on the interior and exterior worship we owe to God,—and would that we insisted more on this important point! But are we ourselves sufficiently impressed with the aforesaid truth? We envy others their ability, their influence, their position, and the good works they perform; but do we as sincerely envy chosen souls their profound religious spirit, which is worth incomparably more than all earthly successes and prosperity? We are enthusiastic concerning the exterior works of zeal, which shine and bring renown before the world; but we remain cold and unmoved when we are exhorted to holy and fecund communing with God. Prayer is difficult, indeed, for those who

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habitually *live out of themselves*; for such persons have no taste for what is difficult and requires much effort. Communing with God is an interior act or duty, not very easily apprehended or controlled. Its importance is fully appreciated only in the light of a lively faith. The lack of understanding and properly appreciating it gradually weakens the soul, without, however, directly causing deep wounds which would rouse a sleeping conscience. When we commit faults in our relations with the world, or neglect some work of zeal, we at once blame ourselves for the evil we have done, because others perceive it, and we dread the unfavorable verdict of public opinion. But when we fail in generosity in our relations with God, heaven alone is aware of it, and we rely on the future to make peace with our conscience, without advertising the fact that our fine resolutions of *future* amendment run a great risk of remaining *unfulfilled perpetual vows*. These reasons practically explain why we attach but little importance to the interior life in

general, and to the devout recitation of the Divine Office in particular.

3. The third danger against which we must guard consists in excessive worry over the labors of the active life. The duties of our ministry are often very absorbing, especially in these times when social works, superadded to those that are purely apostolic, have greatly enlarged the domain of our activity. We therefore plunge entirely into a feverishly agitated life, and are no longer sufficiently self-possessed to devote ourselves calmly, in a moment's leisure, to prayer at an appointed time. Self-mastery amid a multiplicity of exterior occupations is a very difficult matter; few only know how to pass easily from the rôle of Martha to that of Mary, and to dominate occupations instead of being dominated by them. We also overburden ourselves sometimes with employments which have nothing to do with our priestly obligations, because such things interest us, flatter our self-love, or, at least, serve as an outlet to our innate desire for physical exercise and motion.

And in order to gain a few moments of time, we hurriedly recite our office, without either devotion or recollection. If our conscience protests, we appease it by referring to the usefulness of those employments and to the benefits they produce, or are supposed to produce. This is a poor excuse. No work can be supernaturally fruitful, unless it is willed by God, and begins, continues and ends with the assistance of grace. But grace is obtainable only by prayer.

4. A fourth danger consists in not understanding the Divine Office sufficiently. This subject will be treated later in another part of the author's complete work. But we shall now offer our reverend readers a few reflections, which we hope will inspire them with a deep esteem for the Canonical Prayer. If we are not intimately persuaded of its holiness, we shall find it very difficult to make the necessary efforts to perform it in a more fruitful manner.

II. Excellence of the Divine Office

If we consider the Divine Office in itself, we become aware that it is the most positive and peremptory of our duties. As creatures, our first duty is to acknowledge our Creator and offer Him the tribute of our adoration, praise, and entire submission. We are weak, powerless creatures, incapable of doing anything good of ourselves, and our whole resource consists in unceasingly begging at the gate of the Divine Mercy for the graces necessary for our perseverance in well-doing. As we have been struck with the leprosy of original sin, it seems as if nothing sound has been left in us, except our lips to invoke God's assistance: "Nothing but lips are left about my teeth" (Job 19.20). In a word, we are guilty creatures, and a whole life of weeping and supplication would not be too much to blot out the least of our offenses against God.

In the next place, by considering the Di-

vine Office in itself, we are made aware that prayer is the most holy and the most precious of our occupations. The virtue of religion, of which it is the expression, raises us to God and unites us to Him, who is the source of all holiness and grandeur. We cannot aspire to anything grander or nobler than to an intimate communion with God and a participation in the ineffable praises, which the three Divine Persons mutually render one another for all eternity. To chant the divine praises and bless God is to live the life of the angels, to perform the apprenticeship of heaven, and to be associated by anticipation with the elect in their happiness. In communing or conversing with God, we do something which is more excellent, more pleasing to the Holy Trinity, and more wonderful in the sight of the angels, than working miracles and dictating laws to the universe.

The excellence of prayer is no less evident, if we consider its predominant influence in our supernatural life. The nearer we approach God, the more we participate

in the graces flowing from Him. As soon as a soul enters into communication with God, it undergoes the action of the Holy Ghost, who illuminates it with His light, fortifies it with His strength, and dilates it with His unction. It then abounds in flowers of good desires and fruits of good works, and spreads all around the sweet odor of Christ. But as soon as the soul forgets God, it withdraws itself from the influence of grace, and relapses into the slavery of naturalism. Let us not deceive ourselves, without the interior life we shall do little good, notwithstanding all our labors, and even that little will be spoiled by the worldly or merely natural motives that inspire it. "He knows how to live well, who knows how to pray well," says St. Augustine. And, "as the body cannot live without the soul," says St. John Chrysostom, "so also the soul that does not pray, is dead and emits a bad odor." Prayer alone can warrant our fidelity to all our obligations, for it is prayer alone, that obtains for us the divine assistance, without

which we are entirely helpless in the supernatural order. Wherefore, we are actually worth in the sight of God precisely as much as our spirit of prayer is worth. Therefore the obligation of practising the virtue of religion is the first of the divine commandments and should be the principal occupation of our life.

This applies to every man, and, in a special manner, to all who are consecrated to God by the priestly ordination or the religious profession, for they have been chosen by God and withdrawn from the world, precisely in order that they should wholly and more freely devote themselves to heavenly things. It was at the foot of God's altar that they consecrated themselves to the Divine Majesty, in order to attest that thenceforth the service of the altar, which is the symbol of prayer and sacrifice in union with Jesus Christ, should absorb their whole life.

Prayer is so necessary and important that our Divine Saviour makes it our constant obligation, saying, "It behoveth always to

pray" (Luke 18.1). All men, in fact, should be constantly prostrate before the Divine Majesty to offer Him their praises and thanks, to implore the forgiveness of their sins and the helps necessary to salvation. But since the laity, distracted by earthly cares, acquit themselves but very imperfectly of this great duty, God has charged His Church to supply their inability and neglect. The Church, in fact, supplies this by the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is constantly and uninterruptedly offered throughout the whole day, and also by the Divine Office, which is the appendix of the Sacramental Sacrifice. The canonical recitation of the latter becomes thereby a *public and social function*, with which the Church charges her clergy and religious, in order forever to secure the perpetuity of the prayer of the faithful. Hence St. Thomas, speaking of the Divine Office, says: "It is, indeed, the common prayer which is offered to God by the ministers of the Church, impersonating all the faithful." And St. Bernard, remarking that this official prayer

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takes the lead of all our priestly obligations, says: "Preaching, good example, and prayer are our three duties; but our most important duty is prayer." Therefore, in beginning our Office, we should call to mind, that we are introduced to an audience of the Infinite Majesty, whose brightness and splendor effaces all earthly grandeur and fills even the Seraphim with awe; and we are therein empowered with the authentic and official mission of mediator and intercessor between heaven and earth, in order to treat with the Divine Majesty, in presence of the whole heavenly court, concerning the most weighty interests of mankind. In the Divine Office we praise and bless God in the name of the whole universe, thank Him for His numberless benefits towards all creatures, implore His mercy for poor, unfortunate sinners, solicit His tender compassion for the needy, the tempted, and the afflicted, and suppliantly and authoritatively echo the wants of the whole world. And in this sublime face to face interview, as it were,

with the King of kings and Lord of lords, our private personality disappears to make way to our office of representatives of the whole Church, militant and triumphant. This thought, if well meditated upon, will fill us with respect and love for our Office and remove from us all carelessness and distraction.

When reciting the Divine Office, we pray both in the name of, and in union with, the whole Church. In this, our divine ambassadorship, we are not isolated; for the whole Church, embracing in its extent both heaven and earth, unites herself with us, and supports our requests. Our praises and supplications mingle with those of the heavenly hierarchy, and of Mary and Jesus; and our voice becomes the voice of the whole mystical body of the Word Incarnate. "The person that speaks in the Psalter," says St. Augustine, "is everywhere. His Head is in Heaven; His members are still on earth. His voice, which in the psalms sings, laments, sighs, or exults with joy, should be considered by us as our own

voice. So long as we remain in the mystical body of Christ, Christ Himself speaks in us and through us; His voice is our voice, and our voice is His voice." Jesus Christ one day deigned to appear to St. Catharine of Siena and recited the Divine Office with her. Do we not enjoy a like favor, though not sensibly, when we recite the Divine Office in union with Him? Oh, had we a more lively faith, what delights we should experience in chanting the divine praises! We should then be no longer so bold as to displease the Divine Majesty by our tepidity in His presence, and thereby betray the important interests which Holy Church has confided to us.

III. The Fruits of the Divine Office

No other prayer, however affective in itself, were it even to proceed from a Seraph's heart, can pretend to possess even a small portion of the wonderful power of the Liturgical Prayer of the Church. The

first and principal reason of this is, that it is the prayer of *Christ's own Church*, of which we are the organs, and it is impossible that God should not hear the voice of the Church and of Jesus, her Head. Moreover, let us not imagine that only the general interests of the Church are benefited by this omnipotent intercession, for Jesus Christ and His Church support therein all our personal and special petitions, provided they are not opposed to the will of God. Therefore it is lawful and most opportune for us to introduce into our canonical recitation our own private intentions, for our personal sanctification is one of the principal objects of the Divine Office.

The second reason is that the Divine Office is a prayer inspired by God Himself. Of ourselves we are ignorant and blind and do not know how to pray as we should; and God, in His infinite mercy, has deigned to teach us Himself the art of praying well. Indicating the Breviary, He says to us: "Thus shall you henceforth pray." And can it be possible that God will not find

acceptable the very praises He Himself has taught us? How can He refuse to hear the prayers He has dictated to us in order the more surely to grant them? How great our consolation, when, on opening our Breviary, we can say: "I am absolutely certain that the supplications I am about to address to God, and the sentiments I shall express to glorify His Majesty are truly pleasing to Him, and the favors I solicit are precisely those which He is most desirous to grant to me!"

The third reason is the profound impression which the Liturgical Prayer exercises on well-disposed souls, and which admirably prepares them for the effusions of grace. No other prayer more deeply impresses the nobler and more intimate faculties of the human heart. At first the Psalter, like the Bible itself, does not greatly impress us. But if we persevere in lovingly reciting and studying it, we discover therein things so ravishing and so full of unction, as to move us to tears. Speaking of his own experience, St. Augustine

exclaimed: "How powerfully the Psalms transported me towards Thee, O Lord, and with what flames of love they consumed me! I ardently longed to sing them, if possible, to the whole earth, in order to annihilate human pride. Would that they were chanted in every part of the earth! Who then could withdraw himself from their powerful and salutary influence?" The Holy Ghost, who is the Author of the Liturgical Prayer, perfectly understands the human heart and how to move it. This is why this Prayer, notwithstanding its eminent social character, including all times and all wants, is nevertheless well adapted to express each one's personal sentiments, however intimate and varied they may be. The Holy Ghost foresaw our temptations, our faults, our lamentations and regrets, our desires and our wants, and willed that all these should be mentioned in the Official Prayer of the Church, so that we should have naught else to do than to adapt their meaning to ourselves in whatsoever situations we may be placed. The Holy Ghost

has thereby afforded us the consolation of being able to manifest, with divinely inspired expression, the supernatural motives He excites in our soul, in all the various circumstances of life. Although the Canonical Prayer embraces the wants of the whole mystical body of Christ, it does not, therefore, cease to be personal: we are still its subject and its matter; it speaks of our dangers and our failings, of our indigence and our gratitude; every one can recognize himself in the sentiments its expresses; and no other prayer can so captivate the human heart as does this prayer, divinely inspired for the use of all mankind in general, as well as for that of each one in particular.

The foregoing reasons account for the wonderful power of the Liturgical Prayer. "A hundred private prayers," says St. Alphonsus, "are not worth one of the Divine Office." St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi assures us that every other prayer, compared to the Divine Office, has but little merit; and every time she heard the signal for its recitation, she would feel a thrill of joy and

hasten to the choir, feeling happy at the thought of being able to praise God like the angels, and to obtain the conversion of poor sinners. St. Catherine of Bologna experienced so great a delight in reciting the Breviary that she desired to die chanting the Psalms, and said that the religious who would persevere until death in reciting the Divine Office in choir, deserved a place among the saints. There is no doubt that if priests and religious would always perform this grand duty with requisite piety, the work of their sanctification would become far more intense and fruitful. The Divine Office would protect them against worldly dissipation and plunge them, as it were, several times a day into a fervent contemplation of the eternal truths, and would, moreover, penetrate them with sincere contrition for, and purge them of, their daily faults, by placing in their hearts and on their lips the "ineffable groanings of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 8.26). The Holy Spirit would then safeguard them against the wiles of Satan and the promptings of

their own evil inclinations, bestow on them the supernatural light and strength of which He is the source, and endow them amid all spiritual and corporal dangers with the special protection with which Divine Providence is pleased mysteriously to envelop the elect. Moreover, He would fill them with those divine consolations which are the prelude and foretaste of the delights enjoyed by the angels in adoring the Most Holy Trinity. How truly, then, could St. Francis exclaim: "My Psalter is my joy!"

On the other hand, the priest who becomes fascinated by the world, by the heap of vanities mentioned by St. Augustine, and continues to add fresh failings to his numerous past sins, which he no longer thinks of repairing; if such a one is in a disposition or an exterior situation dangerous to his salvation; or, if he does not fall so low, but is always struggling in vain in the same state of tepidity, may we not surmise that his tepid state proceeds precisely from his neglect to derive more abundant fruits and

graces from the treasure of the Liturgical Prayer? The remedy for such a one is to reform at once and to recite henceforth the Divine Office as the Church requires, *digne, attente ac devote*; and then the Divine Mercy will surely permit itself to be moved to heal wounds that would otherwise be incurable. God requires of us, before all else, the Liturgical Prayer; and when we are very busy, we ought to sacrifice a part of our mental prayer, or our supererogatory devotions, rather than to recite the Divine Office *hurriedly*. It is to the Liturgical Prayer that God attaches the most abundant graces, the most precious priestly sanctification. If we neglect these, we have no just cause to complain of the great difficulty of virtue.

IV. The Very Best of Social Works

Were our tepidity in reciting the Divine Office injurious to ourselves only, it would be a great evil; the evil is aggravated be-

cause our tepidity does immense harm to the Church. The Church is a perfectly organized society, the members of which are conjointly responsible for one another. From this relation arise social duties which are superior to mere individual obligations, just as the general good predominates over that of the individual. Among the social duties the Liturgical Prayer occupies the first place, and is therefore the most important social work of the priest. The spiritual progress of each member of the Church depends, before all, on his fervor in prayer. In like manner, the increase and prosperity of the Church, and consequently the salvation of the world, depends on the piety with which the priests acquit themselves of their function of official intercessors, both in the Mass and in the Divine Office. Their official intercession, as we have said above, enjoys a far greater power than their private prayers can possibly attain. The same is true even in the natural order, for the word of an ambassador, speaking in the name of the nation he repre-

sents, enjoys far greater authority and credit than all that private citizens can say. Were you broken-down in health, devoid of talents, ability and influence, you could, nevertheless, by your fervor in reciting the Canonical Prayer, render greater service to the Church than the ablest writers, or the most eloquent preachers can do by their writings and sermons. And God will probably keep concealed from you the numberless graces and benefits your fervent recitation of the Divine Office draws upon the souls of your fellow-men, in order to keep you from yielding to self-love and pride; but your eternal reward shall be only the more striking and secure.

We grant that the clergy should promote as much as they can the many social works for the religious, moral, and social uplift of the faithful in particular, and of mankind in general. The solution of the important, troublesome, and perplexing problems now agitating human society, depends, even in the purely economic and social domain, on the principles of moral the-

ology, and they cannot be properly settled without the coöperation of the clergy. The present increase of exterior activity, on our part, obliges us so much the more to insist on the primal importance of the interior life and of union with God. Prayer, and especially the Liturgical Prayer, is in itself the most fertile social work, for without it all the others would be barren of results. It is prayer that will regulate our zeal and inspire the choice of the means, willed by God and endowed with His grace. Prayer will animate and sustain our courage and enable us to persevere in our holy undertakings. Prayer will duly prepare our field of labor, by drawing heavenly blessings upon it; and prayer alone will impart fecundity to all our labors and exertions. Blessed Gabriel Perboyre was wont to say: "It is only through prayer that we are able to benefit souls." If the Apostles wrought wonders in converting nations, it was because they were united to God, prayed without ceasing, and acted only through the powerful influence of the Holy Ghost. We

can, therefore, perceive the deplorable error of those who regret, as it were, the time devoted to the Divine Office, under the plea that it could be more profitably employed in works of zeal. Nothing is more disastrous to the apostolic laborer than such *practical Pelagianism*, which pretends it has no need of divine grace to succeed in its labors. Such is not the calm, arduous, and fertile activity of men of God; it is nothing more than an inordinate and sterile agitation, inspired by earthly views and aims and subject to the impressions of the moment; it chokes the interior life and terminates in provoking wearisomeness, apathy, and dislike for earnest labor. Experience shows that the priests who are miserly of their time in reciting the Divine Office, are very prodigal of it when there is question of labors and amusements foreign to true sacerdotal zeal.

V. The Economy of the Breviary

The same fundamental principle which dominates and illuminates the whole liturgical panorama of the Church, dominates and illuminates also her theology and asceticism, nay, all her history. That principle is the key of the internal economy of the Divine Office, of its intimate relations to the other parts of the Liturgy. To a certain extent it enables us to appreciate the rôle and arrangement of the different elements of its exterior features. We mean the dogma of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, or the union of the Church and of each faithful soul with the Incarnate Word. "In the affective and effective union with our Saviour, with His humanity and Divinity," says Sauvé (*Vie Intime*), "consists sanctity, according to St. Paul's teaching. It is the whole life of the Church in her Liturgy. In this and through this chiefly consists the spiritual life of the Benedictines and Dominicans, and of all religious Orders,

which are in a special manner united to the liturgy." To these Orders we may add also *all* religious Orders and Congregations without exception, for their members are all strictly obliged to imitate our Divine Saviour, not merely in an external way, but unto complete transformation of themselves into Him, so that each one may say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2.20). The Liturgy is only the dramatization of that grand subject on which the whole teaching of St. Paul turns as on a pivot. It is because we fail to understand this, that we do not discover the inner plot of the Divine Office, or do not more abundantly participate in the liturgical life of the Church. The supreme end of our existence, our perfection, and our happiness consist in union with God; a union commenced on earth through grace and consummated by glory in heaven. But this union is wrought in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ, for God decreed that He would communicate Himself to us only by identifying us

with the Incarnate Word in the unity of His mystical body.¹

Jesus received from His Father all power in heaven and on earth; all nations have been given Him as His heritage, in order to form with Him one and the same Church, one and the same body, and to participate with Him in the same blessings, the same life and destinies, unless by rebelling against the voice of their Head, they draw upon themselves the curse of an eternal separation from Him. By the grace of baptism we have been grafted and incorporated in Christ, so as to form with Him one moral body. Hence, as St. Augustine declares, Jesus can say of His members: "They are Myself, and I am they."

The first effect of this admirable union is *community of goods*. In Jesus, that is, as

¹ It is true that the mystical body is only a *moral* being, in which each member preserves his own personality. But our union with Jesus Christ is so intimate in its manner, and so admirable in its juridical effects for each member, as to surpass all human conception, and forever ravish the elect. Hence its appellation of *mystical* or *mysterious* body.

members of His body, we participate in all His merits, in all His satisfaction for sin, and in His prayers, in so far as we derive profit from this ineffable wealth. In Jesus and with Jesus we become sons of God, temples of the Holy Ghost, heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. There is no good we cannot hope for, if we but claim it by virtue of the rights which Jesus has communicated to us.

The second effect is *community of life*. The mystical body is not inert, nor passive, but living and unceasingly active through the mysterious influence of its divine Head. The holy Humanity of Jesus draws grace, the principle of the supernatural life, from the bosom of His Divinity, and distributes it to and in His members, and thereby brings life and increment in the whole body, according to the mysterious designs of Providence. It is like the vine planted in the ground, which draws therefrom the sap and sends it forth into all the branches to vivify them, and cover them with flowers and fruit. "I am the vine," says Jesus,

"and you are the branches" (John 15.2); "without Me you can do nothing" (*Ibid.* 5), in the supernatural order. Thus everything comes down from heaven upon the earth through Jesus and in Jesus, and no grace is granted us which He has not merited, prayed for and produced in us. All returns from earth to heaven, but only through Jesus Christ; no prayer, no satisfaction, no good work is accepted by God, unless it is presented by Jesus and impregnated with His merits. Out of Jesus there is no hope of supernatural life, no hope of salvation or of eternal life. "There is no salvation in any other," says St. Peter (Acts 4.12).

In the third effect is *community of destinies*. If Jesus acts in us without ceasing by His grace, if He urgently solicits the co-operation of our will, He does so in order to obtain more fully the possession of our soul, and to renew therein the mysteries of His interior and exterior life, in order that our life should be a reproduction or imitation of His. "Whom He foreknew

and predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8.29). This reproduction of Jesus is the obligation of every Christian soul. It admits of an infinite variety of degrees, according to the kind and degree of perfection God requires of each soul. The rose and the violet, each in its own way, reflects the beauties of creation and of the Creator. We can say the same of the souls united to Jesus, those flowers of a brilliancy of innumerable varieties, which adorn the garden-plots of the Church. They all draw their beauty from the perfections of the Divine Model, but each one accentuates in itself a peculiar trait or mystery. One reproduces more especially the humility of Jesus, another, His charity, a third, His voluntary poverty. The virginal souls renew, above all, the mystery of His innocence and purity; the penitent souls, the mystery of His expiations; the contemplative and silent souls, the mystery of His prayer, adorations and recollection; the suffering and agonizing souls, the mysteries of His Passion and

painful death. Let us remark, for the sake of the liturgical consequences which we shall draw, that it is by their own virtue that the mysteries of the Incarnate Word are renewed in the Church and in souls, and shall be so renewed until the end of time. The birth of Jesus produces our spiritual birth; Jesus suffering produces in us the dolorous purification of our sins; Jesus rising from the dead raises us up with Him to eternal life and triumph. How can these mysteries, which no longer exist, still act in us? Theologians do not all agree in explaining the *modus operandi*, but they all admit that the virtue of these mysteries remains forever in their entirety in our Saviour's sacred humanity, and that it is their virtue which produces all grace and will produce all glory.

By communicating with the life of Jesus we enter equally into communion with all the members of His mystical body. The dogma of the Communion of Saints is assuredly one of the most beautiful and most consoling of our religion. Jesus could

unite us to Himself without the avenues of concourse or medium, for His merits form an inexhaustible treasure, and His power of action has no limits. But owing to the superabundance of His goodness, He willed to associate His members with His redemptive work and make them joint and mutual helpers and factors in one another's sanctification and endless happiness, in order the more to glorify His creatures and facilitate their acquisition of the heavenly kingdom. It is, therefore, owing to this disposition, that the riches of some supply the indigence of others.

Let us consider that master-piece, the body of man. All its organs live by the same life, participate in the same rights and benefits; all contribute, each in its own sphere, to the welfare of the whole body and of every member. It is for all of them that the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand works. When one member is rejoiced, all the others participate in its enjoyment; if one member suffers, or but poorly fills its office, all the rest, and especially those that

are more intimately united to it, suffer also, or endeavor to fill its office, to repair the evils incurred, or to aid it in its recovery of health and vigor. The same is the case with that incomparably more perfect master-piece, the mystical body. This body is so harmonious in all its parts; they are so well connected and joined together; that the supernatural life is communicated from one member to another through the action of Jesus Christ according to St. Paul: "From Christ the whole body, being compactly and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the vivifying of itself in charity" (Eph. 4.16). In this body we all live the same supernatural life, and enjoy in common not only the same means of sanctification, but also all the good works performed by the saints in every century; all the spiritual riches amassed by the Church from the beginning of the world have become our common patrimony, a family capital which each one can use for his

personal benefit. When we claim the merits of the saints and of Jesus Christ, in order to obtain heavenly favors, we are only using an incontestable right, for all these merits are left for our disposition and benefit.

Moreover, in this mystical body we have each an office of our own to fulfil, our special mission together with the obligation of acquiring for ourselves the kind of perfection suited to our rôle. This ineffable variety of individual vocations and perfections is ordered for the splendor and prosperity of the whole. If we faithfully fulfil the duties of our state, the whole Church will be benefited by our fervor; but if we betray our vocation, the whole Church will suffer therefrom, just as the human body suffers from the loss of a member or organ. The souls that are faithful endeavor to supply our deficiencies by their prayers and expiations, and to bring back in us a fresh superabundance of grace, the principle of life and fecundity. There is no work of ours, whether good or bad, which does not

have its reaction on the Church in general, and especially on those souls, over whom, by a secret dispensation of Providence, the influence of our supernatural activity should irradiate. In this sense we may all appropriate to ourselves these words of Christ: "I sanctify Myself, that you also may be sanctified" (John 17.19). We should not imagine, however, that by contributing to the prosperity of the Church we lose any of our personal merits, or riches; on the contrary, the more we contribute to benefit the whole Church, the more we enrich ourselves, because we then participate the more intimately in the merits, prayers, sacrifices and satisfactions of the whole Church, just as the members of the human body draw greater and fresher vigor, the more intensely they participate in the strength of the body which they have helped to increase.

In fact, since we all form in the Church but one living body, we exchange among ourselves the fruit of our satisfactory works; we cause our prayers to circulate,

impart our goods, our joys, our sorrows to our fellow-members, and by this perpetual flow and ebb, by these ceaseless reciprocal influences all the members labor for each one, and each one for all, in order that all may be consummated in "the unity with Christ, through Christ, with God."

The first consequence flowing from this doctrine concerns *the importance of the Canonical Prayer*. If each member of the Church must contribute his quota to the general welfare of the whole Catholic Body, there are some for whom this obligation is particularly sacred. These are priests and religious, whom God has separated from the multitude, in order that, being unhampered by earthly cares, they may devote themselves unreservedly to the spiritual welfare and benefit of the Church, either by the apostolate of the active ministry, or by the no less efficacious apostolate of a life of prayer and self-immolation. And if all our works have their reaction in the mystical body, there are some works that react more powerfully than others. These are

especially the functions or works which are essentially social, such as the Mass and the Divine Office, for they are exercised, not in the name of individuals, but in the name of the whole Church. When we open our Breviary, therefore, we should bear in mind that we have become, in a twofold manner, the depositaries of the interests of souls; first, by virtue of our priestly or religious vocation, and, secondly, by virtue of the social character of the Liturgical Prayer. We should remember that this twofold title imposes on us an obligation so much the more rigorous of acquitting ourselves with the greatest fervor of its canonical recitation.

The second consequence is that *the saints enjoy a power of intercession relative to the degree and kind of their perfection.* This is why we more willingly and naturally have recourse to the virginal saints in order to obtain purity and a horror of sin; to the martyrs for resignation in suffering; to the Apostles for apostolic zeal, love of the Church, and the propagation of

the faith. In like manner, the saints' power of intercession is often specialized by certain heroic acts or works which they performed on earth, and for which God rewards them by granting more specially to their prayers similar graces in behalf of their clients. For instance, St. Joseph is the patron of a good death, because he had the happiness of saving Jesus from death, by fleeing into Egypt, and also of dying in the arms of Jesus. St. Camillus of Lellis is the patron of the agonizing on account of his charity to the dying during his life. St. Paschal Baylon is the patron of Eucharistic works, because of his special love for the Blessed Sacrament. In like manner, a mother who is in heaven takes a more special interest in her children living in the world. The holy Founder of a religious Order continues to treat with God concerning the interests of his Order. A saint who suffered martyrdom in a certain region, continues in heaven to intercede in a special manner for the region in which he sacrificed his blood and his life; wherefore

St. Maximus of Turin says: "Although the saints are everywhere, those saints will more particularly intercede for us who suffered torments for us." The saints in heaven continue by their intercession the same works and the same mission to which they were devoted during their life on earth, and God, who makes known to them all that particularly concerns them, imparts to their intercession a more special efficacy.

The third consequence may be expressed as follows: Since the members of the Church triumphant, suffering and militant form among themselves and with and through Jesus Christ but one body, it follows that in reciting the Divine Office we may therein substitute ourselves for Jesus Christ, for the saints in heaven, for the souls in purgatory, for the Church on earth, for a certain class of the faithful, or for certain persons in whom we take a particular interest, according to circumstances, or the attractions of our devotion. For instance, we may apply the psalms which refer directly to the Messias to ourselves also,

inasmuch as we are united to Him, we may rejoice over His triumph over His enemies, as if it were our triumph; we may base our petitions on His innocence and love of justice and truth, in order to obtain from His heavenly Father the graces we solicit. We may also substitute ourselves for the Church when the Psalms treat of her persecutions and sufferings; we may bewail them and sigh for her deliverance therefrom and the consummation of her union with her Divine Spouse, implore the forgiveness of the sins of her children and expose to God her many wants. All this we may do, for we are members of the Church. We may substitute ourselves for the Apostles, the martyrs, the virgins, in order to praise and bless God for the favors He so bountifully bestowed upon them, because we form with them but one and the same body in Christ. For the same reason we may substitute ourselves for the souls in purgatory, bewailing their faults and their torments, as if they were our own faults and torments, and God accepts our supplica-

tions as if they proceeded from these suffering souls. We may substitute ourselves for the afflicted, the tempted, the penitent, the agonizing; for unfortunate, wretched sinners, for our relatives, and also for certain classes of persons, and express their wants, etc., as if they were our own, and God accepts this substitution, provided the beneficiaries of our prayers do not place any hindrance in the way by their evil will or dispositions. Moreover, whenever we pray in our own name, or in the name of others, Jesus Christ, as our Divine Head, substitutes Himself for us and speaks through us. It is He who, through our voice, chants His and our triumph, bewails our sins and the sins of those for whom we are praying, and in our sufferings, persecutions, humiliations, implores for us the mercy of His Father, and adapts Himself to all our special intentions, which are conformable to His holy will. It is in this manner, that we are authorized to apply the same passages of a Psalm to Jesus or to ourselves, to the saints in heaven, to the souls in purgatory,

or to the souls on earth whose charitable interpreters we make ourselves. This idea, founded on the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, enlarges the horizon of the Liturgical Prayer and contributes much to stimulate our fervor.

VI. Economy of the Divine Office

To unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, to live by His grace, and to transform ourselves into Him, such is the fundamental task of our existence, and such also is the end which the Liturgy endeavors to render more accessible to us. The Holy Eucharist is pre-eminently the Sacrament of divine union and divine nourishment, and its special grace is a grace of habitual and actual transformation into Jesus Christ. By this very fact the Holy Eucharist becomes the center of Catholic dogma, morals and worship, and of the whole Catholic life. It is their starting point and, at the same time also the point to which they

and the Liturgical avenues all converge. Wherefore we may conclude, that the Divine Office, like our whole Catholic life, should serve as a continual preparation for the Holy Eucharist and be a continual thanksgiving for it.

If we search for the origin of the Divine Office, or Canonical Prayer, we shall discover that it is an outcome of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The first meetings of the early Christians constituting the "official worship," were dominated by the remembrance of the Last Supper, in which our Divine Saviour had instituted the Holy Eucharist and distributed it to His Apostles on the eve of His death. Those meetings comprised three elements: first, a common fraternal repast, commemorating the true Paschal Lamb, and symbolizing the charity and union of the faithful in Christ; for which reason they were called "agape," that is "love-feast"; secondly, the chanting of psalms and the reading of Holy Scripture, homilies, and improvised prayers in remembrance of the hymns and teach-

ing of Jesus in the “Supper-room”; and thirdly, the performance of the Eucharistic Rite, or the Mass, which Jesus Christ had instituted at the “Last Supper.” These three elements, which circumstances obliged them to separate, or to combine in some other way, were regulated by a Ritual, inspired by that of the Jewish Pasch, which had been followed at the “Last Supper,” and on which the Christian Ritual was grafted.

The first element, the *agape*, could not be carried out for a very long period, because, owing to human frailty, it soon gave occasion to abuses, of which St. Paul complained. But the second element which enveloped the Eucharistic Sacrifice with an aureola of prayers, chants and pious exhortations, was divided into two parts which were to last always. One part became definitely attached to the Sacrifice itself, for it formed its introduction or immediate preparation under the name of “fore-Mass,” or the Mass of the Catechumens, and consisted of that part of our Mass

preceding the Offertory. The other became gradually detached from the Sacrifice, but preserved the same arrangement as the "fore-Mass," in order to attest its common origin with it, and its intimate relations to the Mass itself. In fact, if we compare the primitive Mass of the Catechumens, which is only the primitive Vigil re-attached to the Mass, with our *ancient* Matins, also called Vigils, and which mark the first draft of the Canonical Office as distinct from the Sacrifice, we shall find in both the same elements,— psalms with antiphons, Scriptural readings, the Gospel with a homily. The divergences, imposed by circumstances, regard only the length of these elements, for our ancient Matins had considerably restricted the part given to the homily, in order to accord a greater development to psalmody. The comparison loses some of its force when we compare our actual Mass and Matins, though the parallelism is still plainly visible. To the psalms and antiphons of Matins correspond — the Introit (an antiphon with one verse

of a psalm that was formerly recited entire); the Gradual and the Tract (an antique form of responsorial psalmody); the Alleluia (an antiphon borrowed from the Synagogue). To the Scriptural Lessons of the first Nocturn corresponds the reading of the Epistle. As to the Homily of the third Nocturn, it is plain to every one, that it is a vestige of the reading of the Gospel in the Mass and of the Homily which followed it and ended the Mass of the Catechumens. The other Hours followed the order of the ancient Matins, but resumed and reduced the Scriptural lessons to a single Chapter (Capitulum), for the daily occupations did not permit of prolonged readings. This Capitulum was taken from the Epistle of the day, in order to mark more clearly the close connection of the Office with the Mass.

Thus the Canonical Prayer originated in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus and the Sacrifice of the Mass, for which it served as an immediate preparation (under the name of fore-Mass). If in the course of centuries it became more autonomous, it was

only in order to fulfil its rôle towards the Eucharist, by enabling us to live by the life of Jesus, whom we receive at the Altar. The Eucharistic life of Jesus is a perpetual adoration and also a perpetual intercession in our favor. The Divine Office has been developed so as to fill up the day with ardent supplications and to transform it into an incessant prayer, in order to conform to the Lord's precept: "It behoveth always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18.1). The Eucharistic life of Jesus is a perpetual immolation; He encloses Himself in the tabernacle and unites Himself to us in the state of Victim; and it is as a living victim that we should unite ourselves to Jesus and live by His life. Wherefore St. Paul admonishes us to be mindful of the death of the Lord every time we celebrate Mass or receive holy Communion. On the day of our priestly ordination the Bishop thus admonished us: "When celebrating the mystery of the Lord's death, be careful to mortify your members of their vices and lusts." Whenever we ascend the

altar, we should offer ourselves as victims to the Lord, after the example of St. Alphonsus, which the Church recalls in the *Secreto* of his Mass: "O Lord, Thou didst grant to Blessed Alphonsus Maria, not only to celebrate these mysteries, but also through this same Offering to show himself a holy victim to Thee." This immolation of ourselves is not restricted to the moment when we approach the altar, but we should continue it the whole day by generously accepting all the sacrifices imposed upon us for sanctifying the details of our daily life; and the Canonical Prayer intervenes precisely at the principal times of the day, in order to obtain for us the courage of immolating ourselves at every moment.

As a means the better to keep up courage, fervent souls are fond of connecting with the recitation of the Canonical Hours the diverse scenes of the Saviour's Passion. This practice corresponds so well with the intentions of the Divine Office, as to induce us to give it our hearty recommenda-

tion, for it was dear to many saints, besides being a very ancient custom in the Church, for the *Constitutiones Apostolicae* already counsel the faithful to be mindful at Terce of the Saviour's condemnation, at Sext, of His crucifixion, and at None, of His death.

Far from being only a very respectable supererogatory part of our priestly or religious life, the Divine Office constitutes but one essential whole or unit with it, in order to regulate it, to animate it with a supernatural spirit and to bring it back to its Eucharistic center by our continual union with Jesus and our self-sacrifice, a two-fold duty which corresponds with the two-fold character of the Eucharist — the unifying and the sacrificial. Happy, indeed, a thousand times happy shall we be if we know how to profit by the recitation of the Canonical Prayer, so as to transform our whole day and our whole existence into a continual preparation for, and a continual thanksgiving after, Holy Communion by our self-immolation and the generous per-

formance of even the least of our daily duties! The economy of the Divine Office is admirably adapted to this object, as we shall see if we attentively consider its performance *in choir*.

The daily Office is divided into eight parts (hours); one for the night: "I rose at midnight to give praise to Thee" (Ps. 118.62), and seven for the day: "Seven times a day I have given praise to Thee" (Ps. 118.162).

MATINS.—The night, being enveloped in darkness and silence, is eminently suitable to holy meditations, and, unhappily, is also favorable to wicked thoughts, sensual gratification and vice and to the snares and evil deeds of the prince of darkness. Therefore the hymns of the Church for the middle of the night are exhortations to shake off our torpor, to disengage ourselves from the darkness of evil, in order to raise ourselves towards the Eternal Light, to bewail our sins and arm ourselves against the snares of the devil; and, on awaking, to turn the aspirations of our heart heavenward. The

Sunday hymns, which vary according to the spirit of the different epochs of the ecclesiastical year, add other considerations suggested by the liturgical season. As to the Sanctoral hymns, that is, hymns in honor of the saints, they concentrate our attention on the feast of the day. But the special feature of Matins, whether ferial, dominical or festival, is that of meditation, in which predominate salutary reflections, interrupted here and there by fervent prayers and generous resolutions, tending to detach us from the earth, to purify us of our sins and dispose our heart to a more intimate union with Jesus in the Eucharistic Banquet. The Hours (*Horae*) of the day, on the contrary, are rather a prayer than a meditation, and the reading is reduced to a single Chapter (*Capitulum*) containing a thought, fit to be meditated on, in order to sanctify our work until the following Hour.

LAUDS.— It is now dawn, and there are revealed to our wondering eyes the splendors of creation; at this sight we are impelled, as it were, to intone hymns (*Laudes*)

of praise of God, the principle and end of the creation (Ps. for Sunday), and a hymn of gratitude to the Incarnate Word, who, by sacrificing Himself, restored in Himself all things (Cant. *Benedictus*). We conclude with the Collect (*Oratio*), imploring the fruits of the mystery of the day and in the Marial Antiphon we solicit in our favor the all-powerful intercession of our heavenly Mother. The feature of Lauds, which is chanted regularly *ad galli cantum*, is rendered more precise by the ferial hymns which remind us that the dawn (*aurora*) is an image of Christ, the Light of the world (those of Monday and Wednesday), and the symbol of the purity of the Christian life (Thursday), and that we should renounce the works of darkness in order to cling to Christ and live as true children of light. In short these very poetic and touching hymns show forth to our souls the teachings of the rising dawn, which are condensed in the *Capitulum* of Monday: "*Nox praecessit, dies appropinquavit. Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum, ut in-*

duamur arma lucis, sicut in die ambulemus." The *Versicle*: "*Repleti sumus*," is a cry of gratitude to the Divine Mercy, which forestalls us from the very dawn of the day.

PRIME.—At 6 A. M. the day of the Christian commences with the Hour of Prime, which is his *morning prayer*. It was the hour when Jesus in the highpriest's prison offered Himself to His Father to be immolated on Calvary. We unite ourselves to Him to cross the stage of Calvary with Him during this new day. This is what the Church offers to our consideration in the hymn "*Jam lucis orto sidere*," describing the sacrificial and sanctifying task required of us this day until the night sets in, and consisting of the custody of the tongue and eyes, purity of heart, mortification of the flesh and charity, so that when night returns, we may have the happiness of having glorified God by our holy conduct (see hymn). This idea of the morning prayer is continued in the psalm "*Deus, in nomine*," and still more visibly in the

other parts, such as the *Capitulum*, *Regi sæculorum*, a formula of a good intention in our actions and in the *Response*, “*Christe, Fili Dei vivi*”; and especially in the *Oratio*, “*Domine, Deus omnipotens*,” which implores for this day (*in hac die*) the divine protection against sin and the grace of regulating our thoughts, words, and actions in accordance with justice, that is, the will of God. Formerly Prime ended with the “*Benedicamus Domino*,” which follows that prayer, thereby reproducing the same model as Terce, Sext, and None. After this versicle began the Prime of the Office of the Blessed Virgin; in the monasteries the monks would then betake themselves to the Chapter-room for the Chapter of faults, the reading of the Martyrology, the distribution of work for the day, a short spiritual reading, and the closing benediction by the abbot. This *Officium Capituli*, which is still separated from Prime in certain monasteries, was afterwards introduced into the Office for the secular clergy, but with certain modifications; hence the *Con-*

fiteor replaces the Chapter of faults, and is followed by the reading of the Martyrology and the versicle, “*Pretiosa in conspectu Domini*,” the triple “*Deus, in adjutorium*” and the “*Respice*” and the *Oratio* “*Dirigere*,” which are prayers preparatory to work, followed by the benediction. The short *Lectio*, consisting usually of the *Capitulum* of None, is a vestige of the Abbot's exhortation, which was sometimes supplied by the reading of a chapter of the Rule, or of a Homily.

TERCE.—At 9 A. M., the sun, having risen higher in the heavens, pours its beneficent warmth on the earth; this is a symbol of the charity which the Holy Ghost enkindles in the soul. It is the hour when the Divine Spirit descended on the Apostles in the Last Supper-room. It is also the hour when we are about to ascend the altar to offer ourselves as a holocaust to the Eternal Father, in union with the holocaust of Jesus for man's Redemption. What better disposition can we bring to so august a function than a heart all aglow with love for

Jesus Christ in the Eucharist? Is not this love the fire that is to consume all earthly affections in us? Hence the prayer of Terce, which, in the conventional services, should immediately precede the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, and which, therefore, being so much the more solemn, the Church requires us to implore of the Holy Ghost an ardent charity that may take full possession of our whole interior, and irradiate everything around us, and especially our relations with our neighbors. Such is the teaching of the hymn "*Nunc Sancte nobis Spiritus*," and the brief Response indicates the practice of the charity which is the fulfilment of the Divine Law: "*Inclina cor meum in testimonia tua*." The *Ferial Capitulum* insists on our misery, the sentiment of which is closely connected with that of charity (the *Capit.* "*Sana me, Domine*," and the *Versicle* "*Sana animam*").

SEXT.—The sun is now at its meridian, and the heat of noon tends to depress and enervate our body, and thereby cause lan-

guor in our soul under the weight of sufferings, temptations of the devil and our neighbors' lack of kindness. Hence the Church, anxious for our corporal and spiritual health, prays the Sovereign Lord, who regulates the changes of temperature, to extinguish the flames of dissensions, quench the fire of the passions enkindled by excessive heat, impart health to our bodies and true peace to our souls (hymn). The safeguard of this peace is fraternal charity: "*Alter alterius onera portate, et sic adimplebitis legem Christi*" (Sunday Capitulum), and this law of Christ is to last forever: "In aeternum permanet verbum tuum" Ps. 118.89. (Resp. of Capitulum.) The same idea is expressed in the *ferial Capit.* "*Nemini.*" By acting in conformity with this precept we shall bless God in all things (Resp. of *ferial Capit.*). If our physical and moral depression weighs heavily on us, let us raise our eyes to Jesus, nailed to the cross at the sixth hour, as is recalled by the *Postcommunio* of the Pas-

sion: “*Domine Jesu Christe, qui hora sexta crucis patibulum ascendisti.*”

NONE.—The sun has gone through three-quarters of its course, and will soon disappear behind the horizon, and darkness will cover the earth. Thus earthly things, after shining a moment, shall vanish into nothingness, but God is immutable. Happy he who perseveres in the light and life of grace until the evening of his existence, for he will be crowned with glory (hymn). The object of this Hour is to obtain perseverance until death. Such a prayer is the more opportune at 3 P. M., as it was the moment when Jesus gave up his soul into the hands of His heavenly Father, and redeemed us from eternal death. The remembrance of the bitter death of Jesus Christ as the infinite price of our Redemption should induce us to finish the day's work and our life in the manner recommended by the Church: “*Empti estis pretio magno. Glorificate et portate Deum in corpore vestro.*” 1 Cor. 6.20. (Sun-

day Capit.). “*In timore incolatus vestri tempore conversamini, scientes quod non corruptilibus auro vel argento redempti estis, sed pretioso sanguine quasi Agni immaculati Christi.*” I Pet. 1.17-19 (ferial Capit.).

VESPERS.— The Synagogue was wont every evening at twilight to offer a sacrifice symbolizing the great Sacrifice of the Divine Word, who, when spiritual darkness covered the earth, came down from heaven upon earth to accomplish the work of the Redemption. The Church thus chants this event: “*Ad opus suum exiens, venit ad vitae vesperam.*” The Christians also had their *sacrificium vespertinum*, or Vespers, often named *lucernarium*, because that Hour began when it was necessary to light the torches. Vespers are a thanksgiving for the institution of the Eucharist, declares St. Isidore, and for the accomplishment of the work of the Redemption through the Passion, of which the Eucharist is the memorial. Vespers were anciently called *Eucharistia lucernalis* and *Gratiarum actio ves-*

pertina, and are concluded with the *Magnificat* in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was so intimately associated with her Divine Son in the work of the Redemption. The Capit. “*Benedictus*” is a cry of gratitude for all the benefits we owe to God and His Divine Son. The versicle “*Vespertina*” of Saturday and the “*Dirigatur oratio mea*” of the other days are intended to recall the remembrance of the *Sacrificium vespertinum*, or *Sacrificium incensi* of the Old Law and God’s pleasure in our prayers, which should deserve to be compared to a precious incense rising to heaven.

COMPLINE.—Primitively Vespers were intended to be “night prayers,” as we can see in the ancient ferial hymns. But because in monasteries Vespers preceded the evening meal, and a sufficient time separated the latter from the night’s rest for another exercise, a new Office was introduced to fill the rôle of night prayers, which Vespers could no longer assume, and that was the Office of Compline (*Completorium*), which completes the Canonical

Prayer of the day. Its object is to obtain for us the grace of a good night and a holy death, for the idea of corporal rest is naturally associated with eternal rest. Its arrangement is not intricate. It begins with a blessing indicating the twofold grace to be obtained — “*Noctem quietam et finem perfectum*,” followed by an exhortation to watchfulness, which takes the place of the ancient spiritual reading. Then the humble confession of sins is made in the *Confiteor* followed by the Absolution, three psalms expressive of the Christian on the evening of the day of his life, in the beautiful hymn “*Te lucis ante terminum*”; the recommendation of the soul to God by the very touching response “*In manus tuas*,” followed by the aged Simeon’s Canticle “*Nunc dimittis*,” to which is annexed the admirable Antiphon “*Salva nos*” and the Oration “*Visita*,” to remove the snares of Satan and invoke the protection of the holy angels. Compline is then concluded with the Marial Antiphon, to obtain the grace to fall asleep in the arms of our holy Mother Mary.

In this Hour there is an unction, a penetrating charm that makes it a masterpiece of devotion, so that we feel urged to express the wish that all Catholic families should use it in common as their regular "Night Prayer."

Such is the arrangement of the daily Divine Office. It is simple and abounds in matter unifying our life and bringing it to an affective and effective union with Jesus in the Eucharist, through prayer and the practical sanctification of every day. Let us not fail to observe how exquisitely the Church causes us to exercise our faith, the foundation of all holiness, by making us aware of the marvels of the material creation, according as they are displayed to our view, in order to elevate our minds and hearts to the incomparably greater wonders of the spiritual creation: "For God hath manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of Him . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1.19, 20). In order to discover the spirit of each hour of the Divine Office and

enjoy its charm and poetry, we should recite it attentively at its liturgical time. Matins and Lauds should be anticipated on the eve; the little Hours should be recited in the morning, and Vespers and Compline in the afternoon.

St. Bonaventure recommends the following method of connecting the circumstances of the Lord's Passion with the different parts of the Divine Office. During Matins let us honor the Saviour's birth; during Lauds, His resurrection; during Prime, His condemnation to death by Pilate; during Terce, His scourging, and the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles; during Sext, His crucifixion; during None, His painful death; during Vespers, the institution of the Holy Eucharist; and during Compline, His burial.

THE END

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The Priest's Canonical Prayer.

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